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EXTENSION OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR EARLY TRAINING IN SPEECH AND LANGUAGE FOR DEAF CHILDREN.

BY

HON. J. B. SHOWALTER,

ONE OF THE TRUSTEES OF THE "HOME FOR THE TRAINING IN SPEECH
OF DEAF CHILDREN BEFORE THEY ARE OF SCHOOL
AGE," PHILADELPHIA, PA.

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READ BEFORE
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ON
THE WELFARE OF THE CHILD.

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BY HON. J. B. SHOWALTER.

Madam President of the National Congress of Mothers and Delegates to the International Congress on the Welfare of the Child.

I have been asked to address you on the extention of the opportunities for early training in speech and language for deaf children. I congratulate myself upon the privilege and honor conferred and esteem it no light distinction to speak to such a representative assemblage of the Motherhood of our own and foreign lands.

The early training in speech and language of the deaf child is one of the most, if not most important subject to which your attention will be called during your Congress. The opportunities for this training at present are meagre, and the reasons for this are simply a lack of knowledge on the subject, upon the part of the people. Did every mother know that the deaf child can be taught to speak and converse, that the reason he does not speak, is because he has not been taught to speak that if he had the same amount of repetition through the eye as the hearing child receives through the ear the results would be the same. He would learn to talk and converse just the same as a hearing child. That the time to commence his training is in infancy. Did every mother, did every intelligent person in our own and other lands know these facts, I take it, it would only be a short time till homes similar to the one in Philadelphia would be established in every State and country. America is indebted to Europe for the idea that deaf children could be taught speech. It

was there first demonstrated that it could be successfully accomplished. But it is due to Pennsylvania to say, that she was the first state in the Union, aye, the first State in the world to establish a home for the training in speech of deaf children before they are of school age. When as a member of the Appropriation Committee of the Pennsylvania Senate, I, with other Senators, visited the Pennsylvania Oral School for the training in speech of the deaf, located at Scranton, Pennsylvania, our attention was called to the wonderful development in speech of a deaf child two years of age, which had been left by its mother at the school. She was a poor widow and left the child against the protests of the authorities, who assured her that there were no provisions for taking children before they were of school age. The mother walked off and left the child, well knowing that the kind and sympathetic heart of the great and renowned principal of the school, the pioneer of oral instruction for the deaf before they are of school age,—Miss Emma Garrett, now of sacred memory, would take it in and care for it. The child had been at the institution some months before our visit and could talk as well as any hearing child at the same age. It was a revelation to the Committee. Miss Garrett informed us that the same results could be attained by any deaf child in degree having reference to the difference in mental endowment of the children; that the reason that the deaf child could not speak was because he was not taught to speak; that if he was treated the same as a hearing child, the results would be the same. He would learn to talk just as soon as the hearing child. We could not doubt the truthfulness of her statement, for had she not given us a practical demonstration of it. She stated she proposed resigning her position as principal of the Scranton Institution, and intended establishing a home for the training in speech of deaf children before they are of school age. I said to her, the State should do this. Upon my re-

turn to Harrisburg, I prepared and introduced a bill, carrying an appropriation for the establishment of the home, and although there were but two weeks of the session left, the importance of the measure was such, that it passed both Houses and received the approval of the Governor. The Home was established, Miss Emma Garrett and her sister, Miss Mary S. Garrett contributing very largely to its success. In fact, Miss Mary S. Garrett, under whose wise, able and splendid management, the Home has become such a great success, secured the beautiful grounds upon which the home is located, and many donations for its equipment. Were it possible for the delegates to this Congress to visit this home now enlarged to two homes, and there see and converse with the sixty or more happy little tots from two years and up, I am as sure as I am of my own existence, that every one of you would return to your homes fully persuaded that the oral method commenced early in life is the only way a deaf child should be taught, and you would not only be convinced of this fact, but you would become enthusiastic promoters of the measure, and that is just what it needs. People need to be told. Legislators need to be informed. Public sentiment needs to be educated. In the words of our illustrious President "Let us turn on the light." If the light is turned on, the people will soon discover that the Deaf and Dumb Institutions, where the children are not taken until they are of school age, and are taught the sign language, are institutions that have outlived their day. Every child of average ability when it leaves the home presided over by Miss Garrett, is prepared to enter the public schools with hearing children, and thus become fitted for the duties incumbent upon it in after years; fitted for all the duties of life. How different from the child that has been brought up in a Deaf and Dumb institution—the one fitted to associate and to mingle in life with its fellow beings; the other restricted to the narrow

fellowship of the deaf. If by the establishment of homes in the different States and Countries, for the training in speech of deaf children before they are of school age, and thus prepare them for attendance at the public schools with hearing children, you can gradually do away with the Deaf and Dumb institutions, are you not doing well? Would it not be a great saving to the State and would it not be a great advantage to the children? Would they not be better fitted for the duties of life, better equipped to successfully compete in the struggles incident to human existence? Is it not our duty to do the very best that can be done for these little afflicted ones? Would it be wise and proper to subject our hearing children to the rule that they are not to be taught to speak until they are six years of age? Certainly not. Nor is it wise and proper to subject the deaf child to this rule. Give the deaf child a faithful, affectionate, educated teacher and you have the assurance of the most devoted friends and teachers of the deaf that he will make the same progress in speech and intelligence as his hearing brother. Now, if this be true, and who will controvert it, how important that we provide the way, namely,—The establishment of homes similar to the one in Philadelphia. Let me urge upon you the necessity of each State and Country doing so. You, my friends, have it within your power to accomplish this end, and then the great work of training the deaf in speech—a work too long delayed—will have been properly begun. Begun in infancy, where it should be commenced, and with the absolute assurance of being a success. I need not tell you how you are to accomplish this work. You are all interested in the public welfare of your community and States; your husbands and friends are interested, and are a part of the ruling powers of their respective sections. See to it that they become interested in this measure and have a Bill in your respective legislatures establishing these State homes. Let

me warn you to look out for opposition in the Deaf and Dumb institutions. I know by experience what they will do, and why should they oppose? The reason is simple—their occupation, like Othello's, would be gone were these homes established. What a blessing you will confer upon these afflicted children of our common Father. Think of it! To the ear forever closed and sealed, you open by the education of the eye, the tones of the human voice, and affection's endearing words. You add a new sense and open up a new world to the afflicted ones. You translate them from a world of silence into a world of harmony; from a life of seclusion and limited possibilities into a life of busy activities and unbounded opportunities. To the tongue forever dumb, you sunder its cords and bestow upon it the power of articulation. To the lips, mute and silent as the tomb, you give the art of speech, with all its wonderful versatility and power of utterance. The cadences of the human voice—who can fathom them? The sweet tones of affection of departed loved ones, how priceless, and who would erase them from memory's gallery? How paltry the sums required to establish these homes, and how beneficent, how important and far-reaching the results? With your advocacy of this method, with well known and potent influences at your command, there is not a State but that would adopt it—not one, I take it. The people of these States, aye, of the civilized world, are generous and philanthropic. They are a justice loving people, and are quick to understand that it is the duty of the States to give the very best education and care to their afflicted ones.

Now, if the statements I have made are true, namely, that the deaf child can be taught to speak and converse; that the reason he does not speak is because he has not been taught to speak; that if he had the same treatment as a hearing child, the results would be the same, he would learn to talk and converse just the same as a hearing child; that the time to

commence his training is in infancy; that after a few years spent in these homes, the children are prepared for attendance at the public schools with hearing children. Now, I say, if these statements are well authenticated facts, how important that these homes be established in every State, everywhere.

In view of these facts, and of the great importance of this measure, I appeal to the dauntless womanhood of this International Congress. To your well known, generous and philanthropic impulses; to your high sense of honor; to your desire at all times to do justice; to aid and protect the weak and afflicted. I ask you to earnestly advocate the establishment of these homes. And my word for it, your advocacy will bring results and unborn generations will rise up and call you blessed.

I thank you for your kind attention.